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## ABSTRACT

Students of English as a second language at a French engineering college participated in an experimental program which allotted to independent study a portion of the time previously given over to classroom instruction. Spoken language was emphasized in this self-instructional component. The program, which was new at the time of publication, is briefly described with an emphasis on scheduling. Portions of a specially-prepared student handbook that discusses learning activities and aids are appended, as is a page from a set of self-rating instruments for the attainment of certain learning objectives. (JB)

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MELANGES PEDAGOGIQUES 1978

H. MOULDEN

EXTENDING SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING OF ENGLISH  
IN AN ENGINEERING COLLEGE

FL010 906

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## RESUME

L'Ecole des Mines de Nancy offre aux étudiants et aux membres du personnel plusieurs possibilités pour effectuer un apprentissage autonome de l'anglais (Bibliothèque Sonore et Vidéotheque, encadrement du personnel souhaitant apprendre l'anglais en autonomie, entraînement à la compréhension orale en semi-autonomie pour les étudiants en dernière année d'études). Cependant, la plus grande partie de l'enseignement de l'anglais à l'Ecole est encore dispensée dans des cours collectifs où l'enseignant est seul à décider des objectifs et des moyens.

Cet article décrit la mise en place d'une expérience destinée à étudier l'efficacité pédagogique et les possibilités d'extension d'une méthode d'apprentissage en semi-autonomie de l'anglais. Deux des trois heures et demie de cours collectifs sont supprimées et on demande à l'apprenant de les remplacer par deux heures de travail autonome. L'apprenant choisit lui-même ses objectifs, ses méthodes et ses matériels. Pour cela, des documents d'information dont l'article donne quelques exemples lui sont fournis. L'évaluation du travail accompli ainsi que le planning du travail à venir se font lors d'entretiens individuels avec l'enseignant. Un cours collectif hebdomadaire est utilisé essentiellement pour des activités d'expression orale.

The job of the English department of the *Ecole Nationale Supérieure de la Métallurgie et de l'Industrie des Mines*, in Nancy is to prepare budding engineers for the social and professional communicative tasks which they may have to perform in English in later life. During the whole of their three year stay at the E.N.S.M.I.M. those students who, on entry, do not have a satisfactory level in English are required to study it for three to four hours a week. In any given year about 130 students out of a total of 210 or so will be doing English. The teaching staff available for coping with them consists of one *assistant*, two *lecteurs* and four to six part-time teachers (*vacataires*). All are native speakers. Most of the work done takes the form of 1.5 to 2 hour classes in groups (beginners, intermediate, advanced) of about twelve students.

Although the bulk of English teaching at the E.N.S.M.I.M. takes place in the classroom, self-directed learning (S.D.L.) is coming to play a more and more important part.

S.D.L. has, in theory, advantages over traditional teacher-directed learning. Thus, the former should, assuming adequate autodidactic competence and motivation, be more efficient than the latter. The self-directed learner learns only what he needs to learn, using the materials and techniques chosen by himself as being best adapted to his tastes and requirements. He works when and where it suits him best, at the pace which suits him best. The teacher-directed learner, however, is more or less completely at the mercy of the teacher as regards syllabus, material and methods. In addition, he is expected to work at fixed times in a fixed place with people of varying attainment level, aims and attitudes towards learning.

Our faith, at the E.N.S.M.I.M., in the superiority of the learner-centred approach has led, over the past few years, to the introduction of the following facilities : see *Abé and Smith (1975)* and *Duda (1978)* :

- Self-service sound library open to all students and staff for four one and a half hour periods (1 evening, 3 lunchtimes) per week. Choice of self-instructional courses (oral expression and listening comprehension) at all levels. Wide choice (500 items) of recordings of authentic English and a booklet of methods for exploiting them as listening comprehension material. Handouts on various communicative functions available. Small collection of books, magazines and newspapers in English. English-speaking monitor on hand to advise on choice of material and to provide conversation in English for those desirous of it.
- Cassette and cassette player loan service open to all students and staff. Cassettes duplicate sound library stock. Advice on choice of material and its exploitation available but no help beyond this.
- Television room open at the same time as the sound library. Recordings of British, American and German programmes screened.
- Counselling session of one hour per week for staff who wish to learn or improve in English. Native speaker available for individual advice on materials and methods in self-directed learning and to help with problems arising in the course of learning.
- Classroom listening comprehension practice in third year intermediate and advanced groups replaced by semi-autonomous work on cassettes. Students choose cassettes from sound library stock and are given a booklet describing possible exploitation techniques. Teacher and student meet for half an hour once a fortnight to assess progress and deal with problems.

The first four activities, none of which is compulsory, have been successful insofar as they have attracted and continue to attract a fair number of customers. This seems to indicate that a need is being catered for. The compulsory semi-autonomous listening comprehension practice in third year, while having produced no startling increase in motivation among the seemingly incorrigibly uninterested minority, has however been very favourably received by the others, many of whom have spontaneously asserted that they found it much more profitable than classroom work. It should be pointed out, however, that this venture has led to a 50 % increase in the teaching hours allocated to these students.

The success of these learner-centred facilities prompted an examination of the possibilities for further experiment in this direction. The first question which came to mind was that of how far autonomization of English learning could go. Emptying all the classrooms and packing each and every one of 130 students off to learn English on his own would not be immediately feasible. For a start, there was nothing like the necessary quantity of pedagogical hardware and software available. In addition, unless the step-up of teaching hours which had accompanied the semi-autonomization of third year listening comprehension practice could be avoided, there would not be enough teachers available either. Of course, it would not really be desirable to completely abandon the classroom for, even if S.D.L. were installed right up to the hilt, a certain amount of work in groups would still be necessary. Necessary psychologically as a cheering corrective to the rigours of cloistered communing with cassette recorders and pedagogically necessary as an occasion for realistic communication practice and for initiating, soothing and encouraging startled or unwilling newcomers to the fold. Even so, it did not seem likely that this mitigating factor would entirely solve the problem of extra teaching hours. At any rate, as far as the immediate future was concerned, the number of cassette recorders available would limit further experiment to just one group of students. But while waiting for some horn of plenty to send an abundance of hard, soft and personware thudding about our ears we could, within this one small group, take S.D.L. a little further than we had before. The experience gained should stand us in good stead at the happy epoch alluded to above and might lead, in the interim, to further modest extensions of S.D.L.

In what way should S.D.L. be taken a little further then ? The majority of students being weakest in oral expression, it seemed logical to combine the already proven self-directed listening comprehension practice with an attempt to see what could be done in the way of applying S.D.L. to the speaking of English. This might present more of a challenge than self-directed listening comprehension practice but might, on the other hand, fulfil a greater need if reasonably successful.

The choice of group on which to carry out the experiment eventually fell upon the second year intermediates. This gave a group of students who would not be totally unprepared (as might be first year students) for semi-autonomous work in English, since they would already have been exposed for a year to the *Ecole's* English teaching methods and to the necessity for private study imposed by the *Ecole's* teaching of technical disciplines. Moreover, their experience of the *Ecole's* normal English teaching methods would, at the end of the experiment, allow a comparison to be made between the relative efficacies of the latter and the self-directed approach. In addition, an intermediate group would, perhaps, suffer less from reduced supervision than a group at a lower level and would, hopefully, over a year, make sensible progress, whereas with an advanced group progress might be less tangible.

The guinea pigs having been selected, it was now necessary to decide how to split the time available for this group between S.D.L. and class work. Normally in second year, there is a course on Tuesday evening from 5 p.m. to 6.30 p.m. and another on Thursday morning from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. Motivation being somewhat diminished, if not utterly extinguished, at 5 p.m., it was decided to scrap the Tuesday course and to have just one course per week from 9 to 10.30. At this hour, mind and eye should, it was felt, sparkle more brightly than at 5 in the evening. Apart from some instruction in S.D.L. techniques where necessary, classroom work would, as far as possible, consist of activities aimed at making the students want to use English (games, simulations, problem-solving, etc.). This, it was hoped, would make them more conscious of any deficiencies that needed working on. As the group was to be given a completely free hand in designing their individual S.D.L. programmes, classroom sessions could, in the event of mass neglect of important objectives, be used to discreetly rectify the situation.

This pruned timetable would relieve the teacher of two hours per week of classroom teaching, which he could now devote to giving individual help to the students in the group at the rate of 20 minutes each per fortnight (group of 12) in the now empty Tuesday evening (5 to 6.30) and Thursday morning (10.30 to 11) slots. It would be important, however, bearing in mind that further extension of S.L.D. within the present teaching hours allocation might be envisaged, to try not to exceed the allowance of 20 minutes per interview. The interviews would serve not only to help the students with their specifically linguistic problems but also to accustom them to planning and assessing their work themselves, i.e. in preparing them to deal, in later life, with any language-learning needs which might present themselves. From the point of view of oral expression, the interview time would be useful for carrying out simulations and would give everybody a regular opportunity of speaking English for an extended period. It was felt that this latter feature might be particularly useful for the kind of student who, for one reason or another, never opens his mouth in the classroom

and might lead to more satisfying teacher-student relationships. The interviews would also provide a continuous and detailed check on each student's work and achievement level which, in view of the necessity of providing twice-yearly reports, should make this chore easier and lead to fuller, less superficial assessments.

The only decision now left to be taken was that on how to teach the students to work on their own. As they had never learned English in this way before, it was going to be necessary to give them at least some preliminary information on S.D.L., if not actual practice under supervision. Previous experience with self-directed listening comprehension practice had suggested that gradual preparations and rehearsals were not absolutely essential to painless transfer from traditional to self-directed learning, so it was decided to simply throw the requisite information at the students two weeks before starting the experiment and then to have a meeting to clear up obscure points. The information given to the students took the form of two home-made, twenty-page booklets entitled *Objectives in English* and *Learning English on your own* plus a short note of introduction.

*Objectives in English* contains lists of the sort of things which we thought future engineers should be able to do in English. These are classified under three heads : Reading Comprehension, Listening Comprehension and Oral Expression. (Written Expression was omitted because this skill is reserved for third year.) The students are free to add and work on any objectives not appearing in the lists. Columns are provided in which they are invited to note how they rate themselves (0 to 5) for each activity. Space is also left for marking priorities and any progress made. In this way the booklet could be used not only to assess present standing in English (and hence what work needs to be done) but also as a work record which might give an encouraging sense of forward movement. (See Appendix I).

*Learning English on your own* sets out the advantages of self-directed learning and gives advice on how to do it. The latter section contains the following titles : *Assessing yourself*, *Planning your work programme*, *Working on an objective*, *Deciding how close you have got to an objective*, *Work record*, *Interviews*, *Projects*, *Practicing reading comprehension on your own*, *Practicing listening comprehension on your own* and *Speaking English on your own*. (See Appendix II).

The experiment has, at the time of writing, been under way for about a month only, so it is too early to judge of its success or otherwise. The questions which will have to be answered when it comes to an end are first and foremost :

- Did this method lead to more effective learning than those employed previously ?
- and (with a view to wider application)
- Did it involve an amount of preparatory work such that asking inadequately remunerated part-time teachers to apply it would be out of the question ?

Rather more detailed points which will need investigation will include the following :

- Was the students' choice of work programme reconcilable with what we believed to be in their best interests ?
- What degree of autonomy did the students achieve in planning and carrying out work ?
- Was the required amount of out-of-classroom work really done ?
- Did the students assess themselves as we did them ?
- Was the 20 minute per fortnight interview time adequate ?
- How successful was out-of-classroom oral expression practice ?

By June 1979 we should be in a position to give some sort of answer to these questions.

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## APPENDIX I

## Excerpt from Learning English on your Own

## THE ADVANTAGES OF LEARNING ENGLISH ON YOUR OWN

These might be summarized by saying that working alone gives you the freedom to learn what you want in the way that suits you best. It is only fair to point out, however, that this individualization of the learning process also implies shouldering more responsibility and perhaps working a bit harder than usual.

Working on your own means that you design your own English course (priority of objectives, materials, methods, evaluation) and are free to work when and where you like at your own pace and rhythm.

Up to now, your English teachers have taken all or most of the decisions on objectives. From time to time this has probably led to you wasting time going over work you had already learned or learning new things which you didn't find particularly useful. But if you yourself decide on the content of your learning programme, this sort of thing should be obviated.

Up to now, your English teachers have done all or most of the choosing of learning material (course, reading matter, cassettes, tapes, etc.). You must surely have sometimes had difficulty in learning English when the learning was based for example, on a tape whose subject held no interest whatsoever for you. But if you choose the material yourself, this problem should disappear too.

Your teachers will also have imposed on you their methods of exploiting English material. You must have sometimes felt bored (and hence switched-off for learning) doing, for instance, detailed comprehension of a tape when you would have preferred to listen just for the general ideas. If you choose your own learning methods, however, you will be able to use those methods which you find the most interesting and profitable at any given moment.

So far, you have always been obliged to do your English at regular intervals, in a certain place, at a certain time and at a pace decided on by the teacher. It seems highly unlikely that anybody should always feel in the mood for English-learning in the same classroom every Tuesday from 9 'til 11 and that everybody in a class of 12 or so should feel like working, or even be capable of working, at the pace set by the teacher. But working on your own sets you free to work as often as you want to where you want to, for as long as you want to, at

the pace that suits you best. Working on your own at home can also provide better conditions for learning (less noise, less distractions). Admittedly, the human contact is absent, but there is nothing to stop you working in pairs or groups and there will also be an opportunity for a 20 minute interview with the teacher every two weeks.

These fortnightly meetings, which are intended to give you help with the problems you may meet, should result in you getting more individual attention than you have probably received so far. They will also give you a regular chance to speak English. In fact, the new system should result in everyone in the group having more opportunity to talk than before.

The meetings with the teacher are also intended to keep an eye on how you are getting on. A work record will be kept both by yourself and the teacher. This will allow you to see what progress you are making and what remains to be done. It is hoped that this arrangement will be more stimulating than just turning up for classes, sitting more or less passively through what the teacher offers and coming out with a more or less vague idea of what progress, if any, you have made.

If you feel by now that all this sounds suspiciously like harder work, you are very probably right. For those of you who *want* to learn English, however, it should lead to your learning becoming less haphazard and more efficient. And what you learn about learning English on your own here may be useful to you after you've left the *Mines*, whether in just keeping up your English or in acquiring on your own some very specific professional or social skill in English. And don't forget that autonomy is not English-specific ; if you ever have to learn a new language or brush up on one you already know, there's no reason why you shouldn't do it on your own.

### LEARNING ENGLISH ON YOUR OWN - HOW TO DO IT

The following points will be discussed :

- Assessing yourself
- Planning your work programme
- Working on an objective
- Deciding how close you have got to your objective
- Work record
- Interviews
- Projects
- Practicing reading comprehension on your own
- Practicing listening comprehension on your own
- Practicing speaking English on your own

## Assessing yourself

The first thing to do when starting to learn English on your own is to decide how good you are at English now. You can then decide what work needs to be done.

To get an idea of how good you are at English now, take a look at pages 1-5 of the booklet *Objectives in English*. These show you the *Mines* objectives in reading comprehension, listening comprehension and oral expression in English. For each objective, in the column headed « Rate yourself 0 to 5 », give an indication of how good you think you are or might be at that particular objective ; 0 for no good at all, 5 for 100 % successful, 1 for 20 %, 2 for 40 %, etc. There are two copies of *Objectives in English*. **Please fill in both copies.** One is for me. Pages 6-18 of *Objectives in English* is a detailed list of some of the things you need to be able to do in order to fulfil the oral expression objectives on pages 4-5 and need not be filled in immediately.

## Planning your work programme

This involves deciding what objectives you are going to work on, in what order of priority and when.

First of all, what objectives are you going to aim at ? The self assessment you have just made should have shown you in which areas you are weakest. Theoretically these are the areas you need to work on. However, you may feel that you are not likely to need to do some of the things mentioned in the objectives list and consequently, that if you are weak in that particular area, you don't need to do anything about it. Fair enough - but you've got to be really *sure*. Conversely, there may be things you want to be able to do which aren't mentioned in the objectives lists. In this case, just add them to the list. The choice is up to you. Mark your choice by putting a dash (-) in the " Priority " column against the objectives you wish to work on.

You will also need to decide on a rough order of priority. Theoretically, once again, the priority objectives should be those you are worst at, but no doubt personal taste will be a factor too. You probably won't be able to put all your chosen objectives in an accurate order of priority, but try to pick out the 5 or 6 objectives you need to work on most urgently and mark them 1, 2, 3, etc. in the priority column of the objective list. Again, **please fill in both copies.**

A word of advice here. When choosing what objectives to work on, try to strike a balance between the 3 skills : listening comprehension, oral expression and reading comprehension. In particular, do not concentrate on listening

comprehension to the exclusion of oral expression. Admittedly, the former is easier, but speaking needs regular practice. On the other hand, being able to speak fluently isn't much use if you can't understand what people are saying to you, so don't neglect listening comprehension either. You may feel you're pretty good at reading now, but don't forget that it's a useful way of enlarging your vocabulary and that the skills of skimming/scanning/fast reading could be handy in a job which requires a lot of reading of technical English in order to keep abreast of developments.

Finally, when should you work ? Obviously, this is a matter of personal taste and convenience. In theory, you should be working 2 hours per week on average (2 hours of classwork being suppressed) less 10 minutes per week (fortnightly interview of 20 minutes) equals 1 hour 50 minutes per week on average. The time of day you do your 1 hour 50 minutes average and whether you do it in one session or in several shorter sessions or even in one monster 3 hour 40 minutes fortnightly session is entirely up to you. (Although 3 hours 40 minutes is probably a bit too long to be effective and anything under 30 minutes probably a bit on the short side.) The important thing is that the work should be done and done fairly regularly. N.B. If you feel like doing more than an average of 1 hour 50 minutes a week, nobody in the English department is going to stop you.

### **Working on an objective**

As the objectives are numerous and varied, possible ways of attaining them can best be discussed on an individual basis at interviews. Only very general indications will be given here.

A little further on in this booklet you will find three sections devoted to :

- Practicing reading comprehension on your own
- Practicing listening comprehension on your own
- Practicing speaking English on your own

These give you information on where to find material to work on and suggestions for working methods. To give you an idea of how objectives may be worked on, an example will now be given from each of the three skill areas mentioned above.

### **READING COMPREHENSION**

Objective : scanning a report or technical article. See *Practicing reading comprehension on your own*. The section on *Materials* indicates that technical journals in English are available at the Library. Now see the *Methods* section. The subsection *Scanning* suggests methods for practicing scanning.

## LISTENING COMPREHENSION

**Objective :** grasping the essential points of a technical lecture. See the *Materials* section of *Practicing listening comprehension on your own*. *Authentic English recorded on cassette* seems a likely place for finding technical lectures. If you now consult the list of cassettes mentioned under this title, you will find a *Technology* section which includes a number of lectures on technical subjects from which you can choose. Now see the *Methods* section of *Practicing listening comprehension on your own*. Under *Global comprehension* you will find methods for practicing extracting essential information from spoken discourse.

## ORAL EXPRESSION

**Objective :** showing a visiting English-speaking engineer round a factory or a lab. This could be simulated by showing me round a laboratory you know at the *Mines*. First of all, however, you'd have to analyse what you needed to do in terms of vocabulary and functions. Under the *Vocabulary* heading in *Practicing speaking English on your own* you would see that dictionaries, cassettes and reading matter could be used as vocabulary sources. The *Functions* section would direct you to a list of functions and give you information on where to find realisations and practice them. Having practiced the visit on your own - on the spot or in your imagination - the simulation could be carried out with me during interview time, recorded and evaluated.

It should not be concluded from the foregoing that the sections on practicing reading comprehension, listening comprehension and oral expression contain all the answers to the practical problems you may encounter while learning English on your own. This is far from being the case. Much remains to be done. In the way of finding materials and methods. Hopefully, we shall *all* learn something in the coming year.

## DECIDING HOW CLOSE YOU HAVE GOT TO YOUR OBJECTIVE

As far as possible, *you* should be the person doing this. You will see, when reading the sections on practicing reading comprehension and listening comprehension, that a good number of the activities suggested there are such that you can check on your performance yourself and, in general, one has a fair idea of whether one is understanding a foreign language or not. Checking your oral expression is a bit more difficult, but you will see, in class and at interviews, whether you are making yourself comfortably understood — and this is the main thing. You will also get help from me of course. Self assessment should be a regular feature of your work. Every time you carry out an exercise, try and evaluate your performance and make a note of your verdict. This will serve as a guide to future work and (hopefully) as an encouraging sign of progress being made.

## WORK RECORD

You should keep a careful record of everything you do, noting in each case : objective, material, method and evaluation of results. This will not just be a record of work done ; it will also serve as a source of methodological ideas for the future.

## INTERVIEWS

You are supposed to come for an interview of about 20 minutes once every two weeks. The interviews will probably take place in Room 448 during the times when you would normally have been having an English class i.e. Tuesday 17 h 00 to 18 h 30 and Thursday 10 h 30 to 11 h 00. Detailed arrangements (i.e. who comes when) will be made later.

The purpose of these interviews is :

- to review your progress
- to help you with problems in English
- to help you with assessment of your performance
- to help you plan future work
- to give you time to do simulations with a native speaker
- to give you a regular chance of speaking english for an extended period

20 minutes isn't really a lot of time, so in order to avoid wasting any of it, please be ready when you come for interview, to :

- present your problems rapidly and clearly
- show what work you have done (notes, résumés, transcriptions, new vocabulary, recordings of yourself, etc...)
- show the assessment you have made of your performance
- say what you would like to do next
- say what material (cassettes, photocopies) you will be needing in the near future.

## PROJECTS

You will be expected to undertake a small project which should be completed for the period April '79 to June 79. This need not interfere with working towards objectives, since you can choose or invent a project which coincides with the objectives you have chosen. You are expected to present the results of your project in the classroom. In addition to giving you an opportunity for public speaking in English, this will give the other members of the group practice in asking questions and the results of your project may be of technical, linguistic or general interest or help to them.

A number of possible projects are sketched out below, but these are only suggestions. Your ideas are welcome too.

### TENTATIVE LIST OF PROJECTS

Document yourself on a technical theme and give a short talk e.g.

- Stress corrosion
- New energy sources
- Catastrophe theory
- Manganese nodules

Cassettes and/or literature are available for the above topics.

Analysis of cassettes/literature leading to preparation of module for class use on functional aspects of :

- Giving a talk
- Asking questions at conferences
- Discussions
- Scientific/technical articles

Preparation of questionnaire and study of interview technique leading to interview with and report on :

- English/american lecturers in Nancy
- Mormons in Nancy

Give a talk on any subject that fires you with enthusiasm.

## PRACTICING LISTENING COMPREHENSION ON YOUR OWN

This section will consist of two parts : materials and methods.

### Materials

You will probably do most of your listening comprehension practice using our courses and/or authentic material recorded on cassettes since this allows you to stop and listen again to things you don't understand. Don't forget, however, that continuous listening practice is available in the form of BBC radio broadcasts and films in English on the television or at the cinema and that you can make your own authentic English cassettes if you have a radio cassette recorder. You can also watch recorded television programmes in English at the old Sound Library on certain days of the week. The above points will now be discussed in greater detail.

*Cassette Players.* If you have no cassette player of your own, we can lend you one. But you will have to pay a deposit of 50 F which you can recover when you give the player back again. If you need to, ask about this when you come along to the first interview.

*Courses recorded on cassettes.* These have advantages and disadvantages. The advantages are that they allow you to work on a specific listening problem without the bother of finding your own material and inventing your own exercises. The disadvantages are that courses may not give any help with your particular problem, may not give you authentic English to listen to and may not present subject matter which interests you. It is best to use courses only when they are really adapted to your needs or as a source of ideas for exercises. If you use nothing but courses you're not likely to learn in the most efficient and interesting way and you'll never become truly autonomous.

The courses available on cassette are as follows :

*Kernel Lessons Intermediate.* Comprehension and Expression. Intermediate level. Non authentic recordings. No answers to questions supplied but there are transcriptions of the recordings.

*CIAO Comprehension and Expression.* Intermediate level. Non authentic recordings. Answers and transcriptions supplied.

*PECOS* Comprehension only. Advanced level. Authentic recordings. Answers supplied.

CACO Comprehension only. Advanced level. Authentic recordings. Answers to exercises supplied.

*Varieties of spoken English.* Comprehension and Expression. Advanced level. Authentic recordings. Answers to exercises supplied.

*All the Best from Today.* Not a course. Consists of BBC recordings plus comprehension exercises. Advanced level. Answers supplied.

We have a number of coursebooks for the above, but not enough for everybody. If we cannot lend you a copy of the course(s) which interest(s) you, we can make you photocopies of the pages you need. Copies of the courses will be available for consultation in Room 448 most weekday mornings and afternoons and also at the Sound Library, Room 447 (see door for opening times). You can let me know what photocopies you need either in class or when you come for interview.

*Authentic English recorded on Cassette.* These cassettes are for the most part recent recordings made in England of programmes broadcast by the BBC. There is a choice of 500 or so items (talks, plays, interviews, songs, discussions, sports commentaries, short stories, humour, documentaries, etc...) and are all samples of authentic English in the sense that they were not prepared with a view to teaching English but intended for English listeners. Very few of these programmes are completely spontaneous, but at least they are *real* English and not the simplified, artificial "English" too often found on recordings designed for learners of English. Authentic recordings give you the chance of getting to grips with English as it is really spoken and are also the best source of material for enriching your speaking ability. In addition, our growing collection of authentic English on cassette gives you a good chance of finding something interesting to practice listening comprehension on. A list of these cassettes is posted on the door of the Sound Library (Room 447) as well as in the Library itself. A list will also be available for consultation at interview time. If you have interests not catered for by our present cassette stock, let me know and I'll see what I can do. You can obtain further information on the difficulty and contents of any cassette which may interest you when you come for interview. Should a cassette turn out to be unsuitable, it can be changed immediately; there's no need to wait until your next interview comes round. Methods for the exploitation of these cassettes will be discussed further on under METHODS.

*Making your own authentic English recordings.* If you have your own radio cassette recorder there's nothing to stop you making your own authentic English cassettes, since reasonable reception of certain BBC programmes can be obtained in Nancy. We could lend you a blank cassette and you could record whatever

interests you on it. This method could be particularly interesting for those of you who want to listen to up-to-date news and Pop Music. Whether you make recordings or not, listening regularly to the BBC to "keep your ear in" is no bad idea. Details of programmes and frequencies can be obtained from me.

*British and American TV programmes.* Recordings of these are shown regularly at lunchtime in Room 441. Programmes and showing times will be posted on the door.

*Dictionary.* If you haven't got one or if yours is inadequate, English dictionaries may be consulted (not taken away) in a) — the Library b) — the Sound Library and c) — Room 448.

*Exercise Book.* It is advisable to write up new words and expressions you meet with in an exercise book and to look them over from time to time to keep them in your head.

## Methods

The following suggestions for practicing aural comprehension on your own are intended to be applied to cassette recordings of authentic English since the other sources of recorded English mentioned above either give you working instructions (courses) or are only suitable for casual listening (live radio broadcasts, films, TV programmes).

Broadly speaking, there are two sorts of aural comprehension: global and detailed. Global comprehension means understanding just the essential points of what is being said. Detailed comprehension means understanding every single word. When it comes to listening to English in real life however, the ability to discriminate every single word is quite often not necessary for understanding the message. Unfortunately, many learners of English want to do this and the effects of this desire are often catastrophic. Stopping to worry about words you didn't hear or understand can make you miss what follows and in extreme cases leads to a loss of concentration sufficient to make you lose the thread and give up trying altogether. Detailed comprehension practice is a useful way of training your ears and powers of concentration and of acquiring new vocabulary, but it is not advisable to seek perfection in this field. Detailed comprehension is rarely essential to effective communication. Global comprehension, on the other hand, is important. So when you work on a cassette, the best thing to do is to try, first of all, to understand the essential points of the item you're listening to and then to choose just a part of it for detailed study. Some ways of practicing global and detailed comprehension will now be outlined. These methods will be demonstrated, practiced and discussed in class.

## GLOBAL COMPREHENSION

Success in global comprehension depends on being able to :

- 1 — guess the meanings of incompletely understood utterances from the words you *did* understand
- 2 — predict what's coming next
- 3 — distinguish essential from non-essential material
- 4 — concentrate

Here are a few suggestions for practicing these skills :

### 1 — GUESSING

a) For difficult cassettes : take a short extract and list the words you understand in the order they come in. Now try and guess the missing bits. This means using all possible grammatical and contextual clues to the utmost (and lots of imagination too). If you can't make sense of your list, listen again to check that your words are the right ones and possibly to hear some new ones. Keep trying. You can check your hypotheses at the next interview or if you use PECOS or CACO cassettes (where transcriptions of the recordings are provided) you can check up yourself. With practice you should eventually be able to dispense with a) the list-making (carry the words in your head) b) the going back and listening again (make your hypotheses as you listen) and c) cutting the recording into short passages.

b) Another way of practicing piecing together a coherent interpretation of disparate morcelles of information is to take a short extract from a not too difficult recording and, instead of playing it straight through, play it in random bursts of a few words each, leaving out the intermediate words. Then try and guess what the extract is about. Note your ideas on a piece of paper. Now start from the beginning again and play another selection of random word groups. This time you will probably get a much better idea of what's going on. Make as many selections as you need to, then check up on your impressions by playing the extract all through without interruption.

### 2 — PREDICTING

Keep interrupting your recording in mid-sentence and try to predict the next word or even the way the sentence will finish. Then let the cassette run on to see if you were right or not.

### 3 — DISTINGUISHING ESSENTIAL FROM NON-ESSENTIAL MATERIAL (talks, lectures)

To do this you have to be permanently alert to the logical and discursive structure of what you are listening to. This means being aware of the speaker's indications of the structure and weighting of his message (outlining plan, changing subject, emphasizing, digressing, summing up) and also being able to recognize less important material (examples, explanations, detailing, etc...).

Ideally, you should be analyzing in this way as you listen, but if this is too difficult you could start by getting or making transcriptions of lectures and analyzing them instead.

When you get to the stage of being able to distinguish essential from non-essential as you listen, you can start practicing note-taking, just recording the main points without stopping the cassette.

### 4 — CONCENTRATING

To practice concentrating, interrupt the cassette from time to time and then try to remember the content of what you've heard in as much detail as possible. Note it down if you need to. Now wind the cassette back and see how much you *did* remember.

The above are a few ways of training yourself in the skills needed for global comprehension. When it comes to actually *doing* global comprehension you should, of course, listen to the item you have chosen from beginning to end, since this is the way you would listen to English in real life. Then make a note of the main points of what you've heard (or take notes as you listen). After that you'll be able to start again, stopping in the places where you had difficulty the first time, persevering until you feel you have a fair understanding, overall, of the cassette. Note the points which you missed earlier. You can then evaluate your performance during the first listen. How much did you miss of what was essential? Why? What went wrong? What could you do to prevent it happening again?

## DETAILED COMPREHENSION

This can be pretty tedious work but it can help you to make progress not only with your comprehension but also with your speaking of English.

Choose a short passage to work on and attempt to make a transcription of everything you hear. Your first transcription will probably have some holes in

it. (If it hasn't and you haven't learned anything, get a more difficult cassette, quick !) Now see if you can fill in the holes. Look hard at the context. This entails looking not only at the immediate grammatical context and at the "sense" of the incomplete sentence, but also at the broader context; the preceding and following sentences. What word(s) could reasonably be put in the hole ? If you can think of something in French, but don't know the English for it, look in the dictionary. Does (do) the missing word(s) sound like that ? If this doesn't work, try to write down the sound in the blank. Is there anything like it in the dictionary ? If so, does it fit the context ?

Working in this way you're going to come across new words and expressions. If you don't want to waste the time you've spent finding them, make a note of them and glance at your accumulated results from time to time.

You can check your work at interview time or on your own if you use cassettes for which transcriptions already exist (*CIAO*, *Kernel*, *PECOS*, *CACO*, *Varieties of Spoken English*, *All the best form today*). If your transcriptions are legible they could be used in photocopy form by other students.

The transcriptions you make can also be used as material for analyses which will help you with speaking English. For example :

*Functional Analysis* (plays, discussions, interviews, lectures). Notice how language functions are realized and how they vary with the communication situation. Realisations you haven't met before and which you think may be useful should be noted.

*Logico-discursive Analysis* (talks, lectures). Notice how information is organized and presented.

The above methods for practicing listening comprehension give indications of how you can evaluate your performance yourself. More detailed techniques can, perhaps, be worked out (in terms of your objectives and the difficulty of the material you work on) during the year when you come for interview. The interviews themselves and classroom sessions will give you additional opportunities to assess your aural comprehension in the more delicate face-to-face-with-a-native-speaker situation, since English will, as far as possible, be the language used.

## APPENDIX II

**Excerpt from Objectives in English**  
**LISTENING COMPREHENSION OBJECTIVES**

|                                                                                           | Rate<br>Yourself<br>0 to 5 | Priority | Progress |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------|----------|
| Could you understand complex information or unexpected enquiries over the phone ?         |                            |          |          |
| Could you understand a visiting engineer talking informally on professional matters ?     |                            |          |          |
| Could you understand a visiting engineer talking informally on non-professional matters ? |                            |          |          |
| Could you grasp the essential points of a technical lecture at a conference/seminar ?     |                            |          |          |
| Could you understand a technical lecture in detail ?                                      |                            |          |          |
| Could you take notes at the same time ?                                                   |                            |          |          |
| At a meeting of a technical nature, could you :                                           |                            |          |          |
| — grasp the main points ?                                                                 |                            |          |          |
| — follow arguments in detail ?                                                            |                            |          |          |
| — grasp nuances of sense in tone of voice/choice of words ?                               |                            |          |          |
| — take notes or minutes while participating ?                                             |                            |          |          |
| Could you perform the feats above if the speaker had an accent ?                          |                            |          |          |
| Could you understand :                                                                    |                            |          |          |
| — the news on radio/TV ?                                                                  |                            |          |          |
| — a play or film ?                                                                        |                            |          |          |
| — other TV programmes ?                                                                   |                            |          |          |
| — a conversation between English people ?                                                 |                            |          |          |
| — unexpected questions in the street ?                                                    |                            |          |          |